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SUBJECT: UNSC: MIDDLE EAST CONSULTATIONS FOCUS MORE ON UN
BRIEFING THAN MEMBER STATES' REMARKS

REF: STATE 99211

Summary

¶1. (SBU) In another low key set of consultations on the Middle East on September 18, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry's briefing was the main focus. He lauded the "gradual but systematic process of Palestinian self-empowerment" in the West Bank and later said that Israel should do more to welcome this process. He, as well as the majority of delegations, decried Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank. In Gaza, he noted that the continuing cease-fire was the only positive news to report, given the continuing shortages and Hamas efforts to divorce Gazan institutions from the PA itself. On Lebanon, he summarized that the security situation remains precarious but welcomed the start of the national dialogue process and the signing of a reconciliation agreement in Tripoli.

¶2. (SBU) The Libyan representative spoke extensively about Israeli settlement activity but did not refer to the Arab League Ministerial decision to request a special session of the Security Council on Israeli settlements. Most of the other delegations also raised Israeli settlement activity and voiced concern for its impact on negotiations. The South African Perm Rep questioned whether everyday problems facing Palestinians mattered to the Quartet. The U.S. and European delegations called for Lebanon to implement the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT) report's recommendations and enforce the arms embargo. End Summary.

UNSCO Briefs Council

¶3. (SBU) Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry briefed the Security Council during a meeting on the Middle East, September 18. (Note: Mission e-mailed the text of Serry's remarks to IO/UNP on August 19. End note.) On the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, he stressed that, while no agreement has been reached on the core issues, there have been substantive discussions which must be continued. He lauded the "gradual but systematic process of Palestinian self-empowerment" in the West Bank under the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad as the "largely unsung success story." He referred to the real strides by the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the implementation of its security plan in the West Bank. As a result, the casualty rate from Israeli-Palestinian clashes is at one of the lowest levels in recent years. He described a return to normalcy in Nablus and plans for a further improvement of security conditions in Hebron. He reported that the fiscal gap for the last quarter of 2008 remains at about USD 400 million.

¶4. (SBU) While noting the dismantlement of one manned checkpoint in the central West Bank enabling 40,000 Palestinian living in a separation barrier-created enclave to

access Ramallah without delay, Serry reported that over 600 obstacles to movement remain across the West Bank. He referred to a woman in premature labor who gave birth to a stillborn baby at a checkpoint, September 4, while trying to access a Nablus hospital. He said settler violence had increased over the last month and, while acknowledging Israeli government condemnation of the violence, said credible action to bring perpetrators to justice was lacking. He said settlement construction continues, including a further tender for 32 more units in the Gush Etzion bloc. He repeated the Secretary-General's calls that all settlement activity is "contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention and Israel's commitments under the Road Map and the Annapolis process." He said that "rectifying this unacceptable situation should be the urgent priority of any new Israeli government."

15. (SBU) Serry noted that Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem remain closed by Israeli order, contrary to the Road Map. For the first time in recent memory, he referred to the Maghrabi Gate in the Old City and said the Secretary-General was closely monitoring developments there and encourages all parties to cooperate in the process under the auspices of UNESCO and to refrain from any unilateral measures. In his comments after Member States' remarks, he emphasized that the September 22 Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) meeting is the opportunity for the international community to engage Israel and press it to do more to welcome Palestinian empowerment in the West Bank. He concluded, "We will not allow parties to walk away from their Annapolis commitments."

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16. (SBU) In Gaza, he said the cease-fire continues to hold and only two rockets and one mortar were launched in the last month. He said there were no IDF incursions or air strikes. On other fronts, he said there was little positive news to report. Imports had decreased by 21 percent as compared to the previous four weeks. UN priority projects remain stalled because of a shortage of materials. Referring to the Hamas decision to replace teachers with Hamas-affiliated staff, he said Hamas' actions in Gaza are "increasingly divorcing Palestinian institutions from the Palestinian Authority itself, and interrupting basic service delivery." With Palestinian inter-factional violence resulting in the death of 14 people, he said the only way to begin addressing the crisis is for Gaza to be peacefully reunited with the West Bank within the framework of a legitimate PA in a manner which allows the peace process to advance.

17. (SBU) On Lebanon, he noted the start of the national dialogue process and the signing of the reconciliation agreement in Tripoli. He said the security situation remained "precarious" with the shooting of the LAF helicopter and the death of one of the co-pilots and the assassination of Saleh Aridi which the Secretary General and the Council had both condemned. While the UNIFIL area of operations remained generally quiet, he did note that Israeli air violations continued on a daily basis. He said the LAF undertook a temporary redeployment of one light infantry brigade from the south to the north in response to security concerns around Tripoli, while troops that had been previously redeployed north were returned to the south.

Settlements - a common theme but
no Arab call for a special session

18. (SBU) In consultations that followed Serry's public presentation, the Libyan representative did not raise the Arab League Ministerial decision to have Saudi Arabia request a special session of the Security Council to discuss Israel's settlement activities. (Note: The Burkinabe President of the Security Council received a letter, after consultations, from the Saudi Charge requesting such a meeting. Mission e-mailed

letter to IO/UNP, September 18. End note.) The Libyan representative spent most of his remarks discussing specific Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and quoting reports from Israeli NGOs Peace Now and Beit Salem.

¶9. (SBU) Most other delegations also raised Israeli settlement activity. Per reftel, Ambassador Khalilzad reiterated our deep concern at continuing settlement activity and called on Israel to freeze this activity and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, consistent with Road Map obligations, given that such activity has a negative atmosphere for negotiations with the potential to harm them going forward. He noted recent internal Israeli government deliberations on future compensation for settlers who leave settlements voluntarily. The French Perm Rep said there would be no peace without a total cessation of settlements. The British DPR said that settlement activity is illegal and should stop. The Belgian Perm Rep said that continuing settlement activity is a major danger for Annapolis and raised settler violence against Palestinians. The Costa Rican Perm Rep said that addressing illegal settlements should be the first priority of any new Israeli government.

South Africa questions Quartet's
interest in everyday issues
facing Palestinians

¶10. (SBU) The South African Perm Rep dedicated more than half of his intervention to four paragraphs of Serry's statement which he described as "big issues for everyday Palestinians" -- checkpoints and other obstacles to movement, settler violence, and settlement activity. He (and the Panamanian representative) also noted that while Israel had released 198 prisoners, 11,000 remained in prison. He asked rhetorically if everyday issues matter to the Quartet. He again raised the question of the sewage system in Gaza and asked why spare parts were so difficult to get into Gaza. At the end of the session, Serry replied that Quartet Representative Tony Blair continues to work to get the pipes into Gaza. In response to the South African Perm Rep's musings on the Quartet, Serry specifically said, "The Quartet is the only game in town and that is why it is important the UN is part of it." The Indonesian Perm Rep said he looked forward to the meeting of the Security Council and Quartet representative Tony Blair next month. (Note: While the Council has invited Blair to speak in October, it has received no confirmation of his availability. End note.)

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Calls for Lebanon to implement
LIBAT report recommendations;
enforcement of arms embargo

¶11. (SBU) The US and the European delegations referred to the August 25 report of the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT). Ambassador Khalilzad said that the report shows no progress over the past two years on interdicting arms smuggling across the border and concluded that the overall situation renders Lebanon's borders as penetrable as was the case over a year ago during the first assessment. He called for regional parties maintaining ties with Hizballah and other groups in Lebanon to respect and abide fully by the arms embargo on Lebanon. The Italian Perm Rep said the issue of disarming all militias remains fundamental in Lebanon and that the LIBAT report worriedly underlines the limited progress made on securing the borders. The British DPR called on the Lebanese government to swiftly act to implement the LIBAT report's recommendations. The Croatian Perm Rep underscored the insufficient rate of implementation of the LIBAT report's recommendations. The French Perm Rep commended the LIBAT report. The Russian representative specifically called on all parties to follow the embargo.

Russians appear to
downplay Moscow meeting

¶12. (SBU) The Russian representative referenced the international meeting on the Middle East in Moscow and appeared to downplay it, referring to it as a "meeting," not a "conference," to "help corroborate the progress." He said the Quartet, at its upcoming meeting, would determine the "timelines" for the Moscow meeting.

Khalilzad